

A  
PHILOSOPHICAL  
ENQUIRY  
CONCERNING THE  
CONNEXION  
BETWIXT THE  
*Doctrines and Miracles*  
OF  
*JESUS CHRIST.*

In a Letter to a FRIEND.

*by George Turnbull.*

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*Hæc mihi cedo; — & farre litabo* PERS.

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# PREFACE.

**I***F a Preface or Apology is necessary in any case, it is certainly when a Letter to a Friend assumes a more publick character; and instead of a private missive, becomes an epistle to the world.*

*By way of apology may it therefore suffice; that tho' the author was advised, nay pressed, to send this private letter to the press; yet what only prevail'd with him to do it, was, that he seriously thought it might chance to convince some one doubter or other, of the truth of Christianity: And if it does he is sure of thanks for publishing it; if it does not, some body will probably take the trouble to point out the lameness of the reasoning; and so may perhaps give him new light, shew him his mistake, and help him to a better argument; and in that case too he will have his reward.*

PHILANTHROPOS.

A

*Advertisement.*



## ADVERTISEMENT.

**T**HE Author delay'd the publishing this ENQUIRY for some time, expecting to see a Discourse upon Miracles, promised by the Author of the *Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, does not know whether that Discourse is at last published or not ; whether a late book entitled, *Christianity as old as the Creation*, takes any notice of miracles ; and is, in one word, an utter stranger to what has been publish'd in *England* for two years past.

There are perhaps needless repetitions in this *Enquiry*, and some things are perhaps unnecessarily insisted upon too long. But let it be considered, that it was originally wrote to a friend, and that it was thought proper to let it go abroad into the world in it's original shape and form.

What errors of the Press may happen, the Author cannot answer for ; being at a distance.

A Summary

## A Summary of the Contents.

**T***True and genuine Christianity a doctrine beneficial to society ; and consequently those who wish well to society ought not to fight against it.*

*What no extraordinary works can prove to be true, or are not proper to prove true.*

*What doctrines are capable of being proved by works.*

*What doctrines of JESUS CHRIST capable of being proved by works.*

*The principal doctrines of Christianity, and their connexion with virtue and the happiness of mankind, delineated.*

*How the works of CHRIST prove these doctrines by being samples or experiments of their truth.*

*That the works of CHRIST are not Disparates with regard to his doctrines.*

*That the works of CHRIST are not arguments ad ignorantiam.*

*That the Connexion betwixt the doctrines of CHRIST and his works is simple and plain, obvious to the meanest capacity.*

*That*



*That there is no need in this view of the works of CHRIST, to inquire what a miracle is; or whether these works are miracles. But that in this way of considering the works of CHRIST, all the subtilties about miracles are evited.*

*How the works of CHRIST proving his doctrines, likewise prove his mission.*

*Another way of reasoning from the works of CHRIST, to prove the truth of the religion he taught.*

*What considerations must be taken in, to compleat the force of that other argument: How the former way of considering the works of CHRIST strengthneth this other argument.*

*Some general reflexions upon the religion of JESUS CHRIST.*

*How the being of a GOD and Providence may be proved by testimony, or a mission.*

*The duties of religion natural or revealed the same.*

*The chief end of revelation.*

*These are the chief contents of this Letter.*





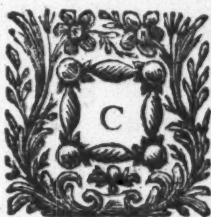
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April 10.  
1726.

# ENQUIRY, &c.



## INTRODUCTION.



CHRISTIANITY, my friend,  
has been attacked with so much  
zeal of late ; that a meer stranger  
would certainly imagine, the hap-  
piness of mankind depended up-  
on being delivered from it. That

it was a belief of the most fatal, pernicious influ-  
ence ; a dismal enslaving doctrine, which ren-  
dered it's disciples incapable of living agreea-  
bly. For who could think that any one, who  
had the least regard to his own private interest,  
or that of society in general, would take pains,  
to ruin the credit of a prevailing faith, which  
evidently tends to encourage virtue and to curb  
affection? Yet these who have so keenly disputed  
the evidence of the Christian Religion, never

B

dared

dared to find fault with the morals it teaches. And hardly will any one adventure to say,  
 “ That the perswasion of a future state, is not  
 “ a most powerful motive to the practice of  
 “ virtue and a good life : or that mankind  
 “ would be more virtuous without such an incitement.”

To correct the false doctrines and tenets of certain professing Christians, is indeed a good office. And the corruptions and abuses that prevail in Churches, most undeservedly called Christian, ought to be exposed in their proper colours. Or, in one word, if any Christian teachers represent the doctrines of CHRIST in a false light ; and put the stress of religion and our salvation upon any thing, besides the sincere love and practice of every moral virtue, their error ought to be discovered and refuted. And our SAVIOUR himself has shewn us the way, by his manner of reasoning with the Jewish doctors. But this is the sum of Christianity : “ That there  
 “ is a future state of happiness for the good ;  
 “ and of punishments, for the vitious. The  
 “ sincere and steady practice of virtue is every  
 “ where inculcated by our SAVIOUR and his Apostles, as what only can recommend with  
 “ any advantage to the Divine favour and approbation here, or hereafter.” And consequently to attack the true and genuine doctrine of JESUS CHRIST, is indeed to fight against a belief the most comfortable and beneficial.

\* 'Tis certainly meer enthusiasm, to think that Society can subsist without a publick leading in religion. And if the Christian religion

\* See Lord Shaftsbury's *Essay upon Enthusiasm*.

is the best publick one that can be devised, is it friendly to undermine and destroy it? why diminish the obligations to virtue, which at least are the most easily conceived by the vulgar, and are the fittest to work upon those who cannot enquire, or philosophize: but are powerfully struck and over-aw'd by the belief of miracles and inspiration.

I have often had it in my head to publish, for the use of modern unbelievers, a dissertation upon the religion of *Cicero*, that I have had by me some time; it is certainly fit to put them in mind, how that Academic examines the various opinions concerning Deity and providence; his way of treating the publick established superstitions in his time; and his sentiments † of those philosophers who endeavoured to destroy the belief of immortality and future rewards and punishments, tho' it was no article of the publick religion. *Socrates*, and abundance of other examples, might very seasonably be set before them. For my part, was I an unbeliever, I would look upon myself as obliged to confute such false notions and representations of the Christian doctrine, as tend to the hurt and ruin of true morals, and consequently of society and mankind; but at the same time to support genuine Christianity to the utmost of my power, for society's sake.

But I believe, and am to give you at present

† Quod si in hoc erro, quod animos hominum immortales esse credam, lubenter erro: nec mihi hunc errorem, quo delector, dum vivo, extorqueri volo: sin mortuus (ut minuti philosophi censent) non vereor ne hunc errorem meum mortui philosophi irrideant. *Cic. de Senect.*



the reason of my belief, for you are curious, it seems, to know at full length, what I meant th'other day when I said, " That the works of " CHRIST were natural proper samples of his " doctrines ; and that I was not a little surprised, none of the Apologists for Christianity " had consider'd his miracles in that view ; the " connexion is so simple, and obvious."

To proceed regularly in this enquiry, one ought to consider, what doctrines may be proved by works, and what doctrines cannot ; or stand in need of such a confirmation.

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## S E C T. I.

**B**Eautiful and natural fables, parables, or allegories, are so in themselves independent of any works the teacher may perform. And no works can prove an allegory, parable, or fable, to be natural and elegant, if it is not indeed so : if it's beauty and fitness does not discover itself to every discerning hearer or reader. For would it not be reckoned very odd and ridiculous for a Painter, or a Poet, who happened at the same time to be an able Physician, to appeal to the wonderful cures he performed, to prove his poetry elegant, or his painting true and judicious.

'Tis therefore evident, that works of the most extraordinary kind, can be of no other use, with regard to fables, allegories, and parables ; except to excite the attention of the hearers ; to gain authority to the teacher ; get him a hearing ;



ing ; and make every body attend with due care ; the vulgar especially who stand much in need of instruction in that familiar insinuating way, and yet are not to be moved without an extraordinary awakening.

The parables of our SAVIOUR justify themselves abundantly ; nor did he work miracles to prove their propriety and beauty.

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## S E C T. II.

**C**OMMON sense is certainly sufficient to teach those who think of the matter with tolerable seriousness and attention, all the duties and offices of human life ; all our obligations to GOD ; and our fellow-creatures, all that is morally fit and binding. And there is no need of works, to prove that to be morally fit and obligatory, which common sense and reason clearly shews to be so. Nor can any works on the other hand, prove that to be morally fit, and becoming, which common sense and reason proves to be the reverse. The moral fitness or unfitness of actions can only be deduced from the nature of the actions and agents ; their constitution, situation, and relations. And therefore works of the most extraordinary nature can be of no further use, with regard to precepts and lessons of morality, except to beget attention, and to make the spectators and hearers reflect seriously upon that moral fitness, which common sense clearly points out to every thinking person.

But

But if at any time common sense is quite asleep or buried ; or if by the cunning of corrupt designing teachers, false notions of religion and virtue are become universal ; and the vulgar especially, who who are easily misled by crafty deceivers, can hardly be brought to attend to the wholesome instructions of undebauched pure sense and reason ; extraordinary works are certainly fit in such a case ; nay almost necessary to give sufficient weight and authority to a reformer ; and to rouse mankind to that attention which is necessary, in order to their being undeceived and soundly instructed. Their eyes must be opened, their sleeping understandings awakened, their prejudices and false notions must be quite rooted out, before truth can enter into their minds with any success, or produce any desired change. And hardly can a task so difficult, be performed by a teacher with no more than ordinary skill or authority.

Such was the condition of mankind in general, of the Jews particularly, when our divine Reformer appeared in the world. And even his extraordinary, marvellous, works, scarcely were sufficient to create attention to the moral doctrines and precepts he taught ; which however are evidently in themselves of the most excellent kind : in every respect wholesome, true, just, perfect. He did not work his miracles to prove the moral fitness ; the reasonableness and excellency of these ; these prove themselves sufficiently : whoever will but attend to them must necessarily discover their natural, immutable, eternal truth, and fitness.

S E C T.

## S E C T. III.

**D**Octrines that can be demonstrated to be worthy of God and the divine perfections; and their opposites, or contraries, inconsistent with our natural and just conceptions of God and his moral qualities, are necessarily true. Thus, for instance, could it be proved that the immortality of human souls is worthy of God; and their mortality inconsistent with the true idea of God and the divine perfections; it would follow necessarily, that our souls are immortal; and no works, of whatever kind, could prove that they are mortal. Nor would there be upon that supposition, any need of works to shew that they are immortal. All that any works could do in that case would be, to excite attention to the necessary connexion of that doctrine, with the true notion of God and his moral attributes.

The argument holds equally good with regard to the reünion of our souls with bodies, or any other doctrine; supposing that the reünion of our souls with bodies, or that other doctrine, could be proved, by necessary consequences, to be worthy of God, and it's contrary utterly repugnant to the divine nature and perfections. But however probable and likely these doctrines, of immortality and the reünion of our souls with bodies, may be in themselves, upon several considerations; yet hardly will any one say, that their truth is demonstrable. How these therefore may be proved to be true by works, is to be enquired.

S E C T.



## S E C T. IV.

**B**UT it must also be observed, before we go further ; that no works of whatever kind, however surprising or extraordinary, can prove reasonings to be just and conclusive which are evidently false ; and reasonings that are plainly solid and accurate, stand firmly upon their own bottom ; and there is no need of any works to prove that they are so. There are indeed certain reasonings from facts or works ; as from experiments, for instance, in physical philosophy. But in that case the facts or works, or experiments are the principles ; the premisses, as the schools speak, from which the conclusions are inferred. And therefore with regard to such reasonings, the works may be said to prove the conclusion. But any other kind of reasoning which is offered as compleat in itself, distinctly from the works that are produced by the teacher, or in which the conclusion is deduced, not from the works but other principles, must not be judged by the works, but by comparing the conclusion with the principles from which it is drawn, examining first the truth of the principles, and next the connexion betwixt these and the conclusion inferred from them. In short, it is only when the works are the principles, the foundation, upon which the doctrine is built, that works can be taken into the consideration, when the question is about the justness of a reasoning or conclusion,

Thus



Thus when our SAVIOUR reasons with the Jewish doctors concerning the Resurrection, for instance, from this argument that GOD calls himself the \* *God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*; and that GOD is not the *God of the dead but of the living*: here is a conclusion drawn from a certain topic, which his works can neither prove to follow, nor not to follow. This and such like reasonings must be judged of by themselves without any regard to his works.

And now, my friend, you will understand, why t'other day, when I had not leisure to explain my self fully, I said, that in proving the truth of the Christian Religion, " it was necessary to distinguish betwixt the reasonings of " our SAVIOUR and his apostles; and their " pure simple, positive, doctrines, for the " proof of which miracles were wrought †." Nothing can be more out of the way, than to say in the general, all the reasonings of our SAVIOUR and his apostles must be good, and all his fables and allegories must be perfectly just and well chosen, because he wrought such and such miracles. The reasonings and the parables || sufficiently justify and prove themselves. And the miracles only can be compared with these simple positive assertions, or doctrines, to prove the truth of which they were wrought; and which can be inferred from the works, as any other conclusion from its principles.

\* Matth. xii.

† Inter Apostolum & Doctorem, *to speak with the learned.*

|| *One may truly say upon this head; Wisdom will ever be justified of her children.*

What should we think of a Mathematician, who gave pretended demonstrations of his propositions; and after all argued thus, That his demonstrations must be just, because he could perform certain extraordinary feats in chymistry or medicine: or of a moral philosopher, that appealed to such like marvellous productions to prove his moral scheme firmly built, every conclusion just, and the whole system well connected. Whatever was thought of the works to be true, we should judge of the pretended reasonings and demonstrations by themselves, without regard to the works.

“ One general use however, of the works  
 “ of our SAVIOUR, with regard to the whole  
 “ of his lessons and instructions, is obvious  
 “ from what has been said. They serve to  
 “ shew he was a teacher that deserved to be  
 “ attended to; they were fit to rouse and ex-  
 “ cite his hearers to give due regard to what  
 “ he taught.”



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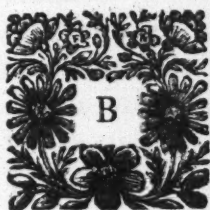


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## PART II.

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### SECT. I.



UT now it is time to enter into the main question; the connexion betwixt the Works and the Doctrines of JESUS CHRIST.

And in order to conceive distinctly; how, or in what case, works can prove a doctrine to be true; let us attend a little more particularly to the nature of those reasonings just now mentioned, which are deduced from facts, or experiments.

It is by experiment, that the natural philosopher shews the properties of the air, for example, or of any other body. That is, the philosopher shews certain effects which infer certain qualities: or in other words, he shews certain proper samples of the qualities he pretends the air, or any other body that he is reasoning about, hath. Thus it is we know bodies gravitate, attract, that the air is ponderous and elastic. Thus it is, in one word, we come to the knowledge of the properties of any body, and of the general laws of matter and motion. The same way, if a philosopher, a physician, an architect, a painter, or any artist, pretends to a certain



degree of skill or power; he must prove his claim by giving proper samples of that very degree of skill or power he professes. 'Tis by proper samples or experiments only of power and knowledge, that we can be assured, one actually possesses a certain power or knowledge.

Just so it is only by samples or experiments, that we can judge of one's honesty, benevolence, or good intention. We conclude a man honest and worthy of trust and credit, because he has given proof and evidence of his integrity and merit. Thus it is from the works of the Supreme Being, that we infer his infinite wisdom, power, and goodness; as from so many samples and experiments, by which we may safely judge of the whole. 'Tis thus we are satisfied about our own faculties and abilities natural or acquired. 'Tis thus we reason in a thousand instances every day about ourselves and others. It is thus, in one word, from one's works only that we can infer his ability, skill, or power, of any kind or degree, as from proper samples or experiments of that power or quality; in the same way that it is from effects, that we conclude in natural philosophy, that the air, or any body possesses a certain quality; as from so many proper and analogous samples or experiments of that quality. And it is the same what the power claimed be, of what kind, sort or degree; provided the power claimed be exemplified by proper analogous proportional samples or experiments.

If therefore certain doctrines of JESUS CHRIST evidently are, or can be, reduced to assertions of his having a certain degree of power or knowledge:



knowledge: his works may be a proper proof of these doctrines; because they may be proper samples or experiments of the power, or knowledge claimed by these assertions. For with regard to such doctrines or assertions, all that can be required by way of proof is, samples analogous in kind, and proportioned in quantity or moment, to the power or knowledge claimed: just as in natural philosophy, or the common reasonings in life every day about the properties and qualities of things, or agents.

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## S E C T. II.

**I**T remains therefore to be considered, what doctrines of our SAVIOUR can be taken in this light; or compared in this manner with his works.

And there are three doctrines in which the whole of Christianity is comprehended, that are evidently of this kind.

“ The doctrine of future rewards and punishments.

“ The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead.

“ The doctrine of the forgiveness of sins.”

But before we advance farther it is proper to take notice, that it is evident from what was said before, of the proper proof of any claim to a certain degree of power or knowledge, that  
it

it must be the same, whether these three doctrines are reduced to a claim of knowledge or a claim of power. The works will have the same relation to these doctrines, whether they are considered in the one way or the other. For a pretension to knowledge of a certain kind must be proved by samples of that kind; and a pretension to power of a certain kind must be proved by samples of that kind. The same samples therefore will prove the one, that prove the other, if the power and knowledge are of the same kind.

Either these three doctrines must be considered as a claim to knowledge in this way;

“ I know certainly that the dead shall be raised.

“ I know certainly that there is a future immortal State of rewards and punishments.

“ I know certainly that sins will be forgiven upon a certain condition.

Or these doctrines must be considered as a claim to power in this way :

“ I have power to raise the dead.

“ I have power to forgive sins.

“ I have power to make happy or miserable in the life to come.”

And which ever way they are taken, the question about the works must come to the same thing.

thing. For in the one case it will be, whether they are samples of the knowledge pretended to; and in the other, whether they are samples of the power pretended to. But the power and knowledge being evidently of the same kind; their objects the same; the works that are of kind with the one, must be of kind with the other.

In which way then are these doctrines to be considered? As a claim to power certainly. For thus our SAVIOUR himself is represented in his history as always declaring these doctrines. "I will raise the dead; that all men may know" "I have power to forgive sins, &c.

But these three doctrines must be examined severally, and compared with their samples.

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### S E C T. III.

**L**ET us first consider the "Doctrine of the resurrection of the dead."

If our SAVIOUR had said: "I certainly know that the dead shall be raised:" What would have been the proper proof of his having that knowledge? He behoved certainly to have given instances of the possibility of a resurrection from the dead; and of his having that knowledge, by actually raising from the dead. But observe how the doctrine runs; it is not an assertion of knowledge but of power: He does not say; "I know certainly the dead shall be raised." But he asserts his power to raise



raise the dead : and always teaches that doctrine in these terms ; “ I will raise the dead ; I will “ give eternal life.”

And what is the proper evidence when the claim runs in this strain ? The same as in the other case. It was necessary to give samples, or experiments, of this power he claimed. And accordingly he <sup>a</sup> raised from the dead ; and gave power to his apostles to raise from the <sup>b</sup> dead. And to put his pretension beyond all doubt, he himself submitted to death, that he might give an incontestible proof of his being actually possessed of that power, by rising himself from the dead <sup>c</sup> the third day, according to his own prediction <sup>d</sup>.

To ask then, whether JESUS CHRIST gave a sufficient or proper proof of his having power to raise the dead ; is to ask, whether raising the dead is a sample of power to raise the dead.

The objections raised by certain Sceptics against the doctrine of a resurrection from the dead, have been examined and sufficiently answered by Dr *Samuel Clarke* <sup>e</sup>, Mr *Locke* <sup>f</sup>, and others ; to whom I refer you. To say the truth, the difficulties moved against a resurrection from the dead, do not touch that doctrine as it is de-

<sup>a</sup> Matth. xii. 25. Luke vii. 9, &c. John xi. 14, &c. Matth. iii. 24.

<sup>b</sup> Matth. xxviii. Matth. x. 18, &c. Mark xvi.

<sup>c</sup> Mark iii. 15. Luke x. 8, &c. Luke xxiv.

<sup>d</sup> Luke vii. 9, &c. Luke xii. 12, &c. John xx.

<sup>e</sup> See the *Doctor upon the Being and Attributes*.

<sup>f</sup> *Locke's Commentary on the Epistles ; and Dispute with Bishop Stillingfleet.*

livered by our SAVIOUR and his Apostles ; but the chimerical additions to it by some Divines ; who imagine the same particles of matter, which conjointly with the soul acted the bad or the good part, must likewise be sharers in the rewards or the punishments ; forgetting their own principle, the immateriality of our thinking parts, and that matter is utterly insensible ; nay incapable of being made, even by the Deity himself, to think, feel, or perceive.

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#### S E C T. IV.

**B**UT our SAVIOUR not only asserted his power \* to raise from the dead : but to give us immortal, incorruptible † bodies ; and to make perfectly happy, or compleatly miserable in the life to come.

And who are to be happy, and who are to be miserable, according to his doctrine ? The virtuous and regular are to be rewarded ; the vitious and immoral are to be punished. Every one is to be judged by his works, by his conduct, and approved or condemned accordingly.

Instinct, Reason, and the universal consent of all nations and ages of the world, conjoin to render this doctrine probable, which our SAVIOUR has set beyond all doubt, by the samples he gave of his power to bestow blessings, or inflict miseries of every sort. Consider but his works in this light ; and were they not all so many experiments or instances of this power ? he made the

\* John v. 20, &c.

† 1 Cor. xv.

ignorant and simple wife in a moment: changed the tempers and dispositions of men almost instantaneously: cured the most malign, inveterate, diseases by a word of his mouth: delivered in the same instantaneous, wonderful, manner, from infirmities of every kind: and bestowed upon whom he pleased, the most marvellous and surprizing gifts and talents\*. His transfiguration was a plain specimen and example of the glory and lustre he could give to our bodies after the resurrection. And all his works, in one word, were one continued series of proper and analogous experiments, to prove his power to curse or bless; banish diseases and infirmities; bestow blessings of every kind, moral or corporeal: make happy; compleatly happy, or compleatly wretched.

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## S E C T. V.

**O**UR SAVIOUR† also taught the forgiveness of sins. And how did he prove his pretension to this power? By these very experiments and samples that he gave of his power to deliver from miseries, and render happy. For what is it to forgive sins? is it not to deliver from those miseries sin justly merits; or to which it renders the sinner obnoxious?

And accordingly he asserted his power to forgive sins: but that all men might know he had

\* Matth. xiv. 25, &c. Mark iv. 40, &c. Matth. ix. 35, &c. Matth. xiv. 14, &c. Matth. xii. 25, &c. Matth. xv. 21, &c. Matth. xx. 35, &c. Matth. xxi. 14, &c. Luke xii. 12, &c. Luke x. 8, &c. Mark iii. 15.

† Matth. xxviii. Mark xvi. Luke xxiv. John xx.

indeed



indeed that power; he ordered the lame, whose sins he pronounced remitted and forgiven, to arise take up the couch and walk. † The dumb spoke; the deaf heard; the lame walked strait and firmly: he cured all diseases; and bestowed health, strength, and all sorts of blessings: at his command also the dead arose; to prove that he could forgive sins, or deliver the penitent from all the pains and miseries his sinful life had righteously deserved.

Let us take notice however, how cautious he was of giving any encouragement to the wicked, by his doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. It was only to those who seriously repented and reformed, that he gave the agreeable hopes of finding pardon. It was not to such as continued in their sins, in spite of frequent Remorses and professions of repentance: but to such as really turned to the love and practice of virtue; and sincerely forsook their wicked ways, in the habitual course of their lives and practice.

And therefore we find that where there was no Faith, he refused to work cure. Where there was no Faith: that is, where he found not that sincere, unprejudiced; that pliable, docile temper, that is necessary in order to reformation, or receiving wholesome instruction: but on the contrary, obstinacy, stubbornness, malignity of disposition, and every bad quality. That this is the meaning is plain, because he upbraids them for their malice and blind obstinacy; the hardness of their hearts; and calls them children of

† Matth. ix. 5, &c. Mark ii. 10. Luke v. 20, &c. Mark xiii. 11, &c.

|| Matth. xiii. 58, &c.

the Devil sometimes; a phrase that sounds harsh in our tongue; but is well known by those who are skill'd in the original languages, to mean no more, but that they hated the light and loved darkness, because their works were evil, as he himself speaks at other times.

Thus in the whole of his conduct, he carefully shunned, by a promiscuous bestowal of his favours and blessings, to give any handle to the most terrible, pernicious abuse of his doctrine concerning the forgiveness of sins; as if in consequence of it, *men might sin that grace might the more abound*†. And at the same time gave full assurance of his power to deliver sincere reformers, from the just demerits of their former evil practices; if an infinity of instances of power to deliver from all sorts of pains and miseries, and to confer all kinds of blessings, are proper and adequate samples of a power to curse and bless, make happy or miserable.

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## S E C T. VI.

**I** Have not time to give you an exact history or detail of the works of our SAVIOUR recorded in the gospels; nor is it necessary: after these hints it will be easy, in reading over the gospels, to refer the works narrated there, to these three doctrines.

† Luke vii. 9, &c. Luke x. 9, &c. John xi. 14, &c. Matth. x. 19, &c. Matth. viii. 42, &c.

But

But, says a noble author\*, “ Signs of power  
 “ may prove power, but cannot prove honesty,  
 “ or create trust.”

And to say the Truth, it was this way of speaking about miracles, that first gave me the hint of considering the miracles of our SAVIOUR as samples of his pretended power. But in answer to this, let us consider how honesty and good intention can only be ascertained. To be sure it must shew itself by an uniform untainted conduct and behaviour; by a continued course of honest and benevolent deeds; by a series uninterrupted of samples of goodness and sincerity. And was not the whole of our SAVIOUR’S conduct the fittest that can be imagined to gain him credit in this way? what ground did he ever give to suspect his fidelity, or call his truth and honesty in question? Were not these very works†, that proved his power at the same time, so many irrefragable evidences of his goodness, sincerity, and benevolent honest intention? It was necessary to give some examples of his power to curse as well as to bless. For such is the nature of the common herd of mankind, that one instance of suffering makes more impression upon their weak and fearful minds, than a thousand examples of happiness. But he chose to shew his power to inflict pains and miseries; to blast and curse by such examples as might serve the purpose sufficiently, and yet do very little mischief: as in cursing the fig-tree ||, and sending the De-

\* *The Earl of Shaftsbury somewhere in his Moral Rhapsody.*

† *I need not put you in mind upon this head, that by Devils are to be understood violent terrible maladies; for that has often been made plain, and is now, I believe, generally agreed on.*

|| Matth. iv. 19. Mark xi. 14, &c.



vils into the sea \*. He delighted not in cursing, but in blessing; he rejoiced in works of mercy and benevolence; and went about continually doing good. But there is the less reason to insist upon this article, that even those who have called him an impostor never ventured to charge him with malice, or any bad mischievous design: but on the contrary, have been obliged to acknowledge, that he gave all the possible marks of a good, generous, and well-disposed Teacher of the soundest morals.

In judging however of our SAVIOUR's pretension; his conduct, and the evidences that he gave of his honesty, and sincere good disposition, must certainly be taken into the account. He himself tells his disciples, that they were not to trust to miracles only; because not only might false teachers *work miracles*, but there should actually come after him *false Christs* †, false prophets, working miracles; but that, together with the miracles, they were to consider the doctrine and the conduct of pretended extraordinary Teachers: to judge of the *tree by it's fruit* ‡.

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## S E C T. VII.

**B**UT having considered the samples JESUS CHRIST gave of the power he claimed by his doctrines: it must be observed next, that he pretended to a divine commission to teach these doctrines; and by them to encourage and excite

\* Mark v. 13, &c.  
 ‡ Matth. xii. 33.

† Matth. xxiv. 24. Mark xiii. 22.

to the practice of virtue, and to discourage sin and vice.

And with regard to his pretended mission; it is evident, that if the particular doctrines, that is, the particular assertions of power, are sufficiently justified and proved by proper samples; the truth of the mission follows in course. For what reason can there possibly be to doubt of the mission, when the particular power the missionary claims, as missionary, is sufficiently ascertained by proper samples?

But besides the whole series of the miracles of JESUS CHRIST may be justly considered as one continued proof of the general pretension to a mission: as one continued proof that, as he asserted, all power \* was given unto him of GOD who sent him. For by his works he shewed, that he had an universal command of nature: a power that nothing could controul. † The seas, the winds, all the elements, every thing above or below obeyed his all-commanding voice. His works therefore in this case are still proper adequate samples.

But to leave no room for doubt or scepticism, let us make a separate question of the pretended mission; and enquire what is necessary to prove a mission.

And when one pretends to a mission, there are three things requisite to compleat his credentials. “ The doctrines he teaches must be  
“ of importance; such as it concerns mankind  
“ much to be assured of; and have an evident

\* Mark iv. 39, &c.

† Ibid. vi. 11.

“ connexion

“ connexion with our peace and happiness, and  
 “ a plain tendency to promote virtue and piety.”

And such certainly are the doctrines which JESUS CHRIST taught: they are such as the wise in all ages have earnestly wished to be assured of by a proper evidence. They are, in one word, the only doctrines that have any connexion with virtue \* and piety; or the happiness of mankind, which natural reason is in the dark about, and cannot ascertain beyond all doubt.

“ Next the missionary must behave himself in  
 “ such a manner, as that we may have sufficient  
 “ reason, from his conduct, to trust and put  
 “ full confidence in him.”

And such certainly was the whole of our SAVIOUR's conduct and behaviour; that either we may safely rely upon his word, and believe in his honesty; or no marks, no samples of goodness, sincerity, and faithfulness, are sufficient to create trust.

“ Last of all, the pretended missionary must  
 “ give a proper and full evidence, that he  
 “ really is possessed of any degree of power he  
 “ claims; and of the knowledge that is necessary to render him capable of ascertaining these  
 “ doctrines to us which he asserts and teaches.”

And have we not already found that he gave proper and adequate samples of the power he claimed by his doctrines? and do not all his

\* *Well might our Saviour say, That such who know the will of GOD, and do it; must own and acknowledge his doctrines to be of GOD.*



works shew that universal knowledge of nature, and the government of the world ; which is sufficient to put his capacity to teach us the doctrines he taught beyond all controversy ? Who is sufficient to instruct us, if he who gave samples of such extraordinary knowledge was not ? What greater degree of knowledge can we require in an instructor ; or what other samples of the knowledge requisite to to instruct us ? consider him as pretending to come from God, to tell us that he had power given unto him of God *to raise the dead*†, *to forgive sins*, and to make the virtuous happy, and the wicked miserable, in the life to come. And as this was indeed his pretension ; so we have already seen that his works were proper and proportioned samples of his right to claim such power. Consider him as pretending to come from God, to teach mankind that there will be a future state, and a resurrection of the dead ; and that those who repent and reform their lives, will be forgiven and made happy in a future life ; but that the impenitent, and such as continue to lead vitious and disorderly lives, will be punished in that after life. And still his works are proper and adequate experiments, that he had the knowledge requisite to give us this information. For he shewed that the dead could be raised ; that he knew how to raise the dead ; and could actually raise them ; that he could make happy or miserable in any degree ; that he could forgive sins ; or give full and compleat evidence when sins were forgiven ; because he could deliver those whose sins he pronounced forgiven, from any sorts of pains or miseries, to which sin renders obnoxious.

† John v. 19, &c. Matth. xi. 27.

If we abstract from the history of our SAVIOUR, and inquire with our selves what would be a full and compleat evidence of a mission from GOD to teach ; it is not difficult to find out what the evidence must be. For we know the limits of our natural reason, and what doctrines of importance, with regard to GOD and ourselves, it is not able to satisfy us fully about. And we have so much knowledge of GOD, as to be able to determine what doctrines he would instruct us in, by an extraordinary missionary ; if he should ever condescend to teach us in that manner. These very doctrines to be sure, which have a connexion with virtue and piety, that natural reason is not able to deduce certainly from any principles ; and these only are the doctrines which JESUS CHRIST taught.

And as for what regards testimony †, common reason tells us the evidence that is requisite to render it credible and worthy of our reception. All, to be sure, that can be demanded is, that there be good ground to trust our informer as to his honesty ; and next, that he give sufficient samples of the kind of knowledge he pretends to, or that is necessary in order to his giving us such and such information : samples analogous in kind, and proportioned to the degree of knowledge he claims, by pretending to inform us of certain truths.

Having therefore shewed that our SAVIOUR gave samples of his sincerity and honest design ; and at the same time adequate samples of the power

† *We must reason concerning the proper credentials, or evidences of testimony, in every case the same way ; in this just as in any other.*

and knowledge he pretended to ; it follows necessarily, that there is all the reason in the world to believe in him, and give him full credit.

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## S E C T. VIII.

**A**ND is this then, perhaps you'll say, the whole of Christianity? Yes it is; and a noble and perfect system indeed it is, containing all the encouragements that can be thought of, or desired, to virtue, piety, and goodness, the love of God and our fellow-creatures ; which common reason sufficiently tells us, if we would but hearken to it's dictates, is the whole duty of man.

These doctrines above explained are clearly insisted upon by our SAVIOUR and his Apostles ||. These doctrines are ever and ever insisted upon by them, as the chief ; as the only doctrines of consequence they had to instruct us in †. These doctrines are ever inculcated by them, as motives to the practice of virtue. These are the doctrines the best of the ancient philosophers, would have rejoiced to have found sufficient evidence to believe. And these doctrines being ascertained, we are fully instructed in every thing that relates to virtue, to this life, or the life to come, that it concerns us to know. Had I not then good reason to say in the beginning of this letter, my friend, “ That “ the doctrine of a future state is the sum of “ Christianity.” For the doctrines abovementioned

|| John v. 2. — vi. 38, 44. — xiii. 44. — xiv. 33. Acts ii. 29. — iii. 26. — iv. 10. — x. 42. — xviii. 30. 1 Cor. xv.

† See the texts cited in the foregoing pages.



tioned are easily reducible to this one proposition, with this single additional circumstance, "That after our souls have been for some time separated from their bodies, they are to be again embodied." And consequently to fight against Christianity, is to fight against a belief the most chearing and comfortable; a most strong and powerful perswasive to a virtuous and good conversation.

There are several obscure places, especially in the epistles of the Apostles, about the interpretation of which the learned Criticks and Divines have been much divided in all the after ages of Christianity. But that is argument enough, that christians are not much intrusted in the certain knowledge of their meaning. That can never be said to be revealed, which is not made plain; or which remains liable to various and uncertain interpretation. Our salvation cannot possibly depend upon that which it is difficult, not to say impossible, even for much learning certainly to determine and define. Not to mention that common sense and reason tells plainly and indisputably, that it is only virtue and goodness that can recommend, or make acceptable to God, who is all virtue, all reason, all goodness. And indeed to imagine otherwise, is to suppose that the most useful quality is not the most valuable: or that God, who is infinite wisdom, doth not delight most in that which is of all other qualities the most excellent and deserving ||.

We are called by JESUS CHRIST to believe in him: that is, to believe he really had a mis-

*|| If there is a GOD; and that there is, all nature cries aloud, he must delight in virtue. Virtue is the perfection of the human nature.*

lion

sion to inculcate virtue by these doctrines he taught; and really had the power he claimed by these doctrines: that thus believing in him we might fall in love with virtue, and seek earnestly for glory, honour, and immortality, by a sincere and firm adherence to virtue, in spight of all temptations and seducements. To believe in him is nothing else than to believe the authority he had to excite to virtue and piety by his doctrines; his power to forgive sins and raise the dead. And this faith can be of no value or merit, unless it produces good fruits; unless the end of his teaching is gained, which is to persuade to live a natural, manly, and virtuous life; in every circumstance to behave as becometh a thinking, reasonable being; to love GOD, and, like him, to delight in doing good. Without such works faith is dead †.

A great many questions are asked and disputed, about the state of those who have not heard of CHRIST. But the answer to them all is obvious. Those who have not heard of CHRIST, cannot believe: but those have yet a law within themselves, teaching them their duty, the duty CHRIST taught; the whole duty of man ||.

That the doctrine of CHRIST however is not more generally known throughout the world, is the fault of Christians, who take not the right methods to propagate it; but have, the greater part, ever done their utmost, either foolishly or wickedly, to marr it's progress. The Christian Religion can only be propagated in the rational way of argument and persuasion; and it is

† James iii. 20. || *This is the Apostle Paul's account of the matter.* Rom. ii.

the integrity and purity of the lives of professing christians; and their moderation, and humanity towards unbelievers, that ever will have the greatest influence to recommend Christianity, and promote the belief and love of it. The temper and spirit which true and genuine Christianity inspires, is a spirit of meekness and gentleness, charity and compassion; *slow to wrath; ready to forgive; prompt to good works.* And where this temper is not found, there is not the same spirit that was in CHRIST and his Apostles; nor the disposition that only can render agreeable to GOD who sent him into the world to teach humility, benevolence, and to curb affection; and to exemplify all the moral virtues in his life and conduct; as well as to give the strongest inducements to the practice of them by his doctrines.

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### S E C T. IX.

**B**UT by this time, my friend, I am afraid you begin to dread a sermon. And therefore to return to the argument:

If it is allowed, as it must certainly be, that the three doctrines so often repeated are the chief doctrines of Christianity; Christianity carries the same evidence along with it, that any doctrine does, which is confirmed by the plainest, the most proper, or analogous experiments.

“ The works of JESUS CHRIST considered  
“ as samples of the power he claimed, are not

|| James iv. 1 Cor. xiii.

*Disperates,*



“ *Disperates*, with regard to his doctrines, as  
 “ *Spinoza* alledges miracles must be with regard  
 “ to doctrines.”

It is true, miracles, when considered in a general abstract view, do not appear to have any relation to doctrines: nothing at first sight can seem more distinct or remote the one from the other. And then it is commonly objected against the proof offered from miracles: what can miracles have to do in the case; miracles may prove power; but what is that to the truth of doctrines? But take the doctrines and the works of CHRIST, and compare them together, and the relation and connexion is obvious. Samples of power to raise the dead, prove the power to raise the dead: and samples of power to make happy, prove the power to make happy: in the same way that samples of gravity prove gravity; or samples of elasticity prove elasticity; or that samples of skill in any sort, prove skill of that sort. There is the same relation, in one word, betwixt the doctrines of JESUS CHRIST and his works, that there is betwixt any experiment, and the conclusion that naturally follows from it.

“ Nor are the works of JESUS CHRIST arguments *ad ignorantiam*, (as the same author “ says) miracles must ever be.” For the works of JESUS CHRIST, however much above our comprehension, bear a plain relation to his doctrines; and it is only the truth of the facts or samples, and their relation to the doctrine, that we are concerned to understand. That can never be said to be a proof *ad ignorantiam*, the connexion of which with the thing proved, or the conclusion inferred, is clearly perceived.

The

The works of JESUS CHRIST are not arguments of power, we know not what : they are arguments of the very power he pretended to ; because samples of that very power. Arguments of his power to raise the dead ; forgive sins ; make happy or miserable. Arguments of an universal knowledge of nature ; and unlimited authority over all things ; arguments, in short, of the whole of his pretension ; because samples of all he pretended to.

Tho' we understand not the nature of that power which raises the dead ; tho' the raising the dead be a work above our ability and comprehension ; yet a sample of power to raise the dead, proves that power ; and the connexion betwixt the sample and the power pretended to is not above our comprehension, but is easily understood. Attraction, say all the philosophers, is above our comprehension : they cannot explain how bodies attract : but experience or samples certainly prove that there is attraction. And proper experiments or samples, must equally prove the power of raising the dead, tho' we do not understand, or cannot explain, that power.

But because there is so much controversy about that common distinction betwixt things above our reason, and things contrary to our reason, it may not be amiss, on this occasion to say something about it.

And an example taken from natural philosophy will soon clear the matter : Attraction can only be known by experience, and samples abundantly prove it. But it is above our reason or comprehension ? What is the meaning of that ?

that? why it is only to say, that a thousand questions may be asked about it, to which no answer can be given; because we know not enough about it, to answer them. We know, that it is; and the laws according to which it produces it's effects: And that is all we know of it. And our not being able to give satisfying answers to other questions, that may be asked about it, only proves that there is a great deal relating to it, we do not know.

In the same manner a thousand questions may be ask'd about raising the dead, which we can't answer. A sample however proves the possibility: and many samples as certainly prove the power to raise the dead; as samples of attraction prove attraction. Nor indeed can the power of raising the dead, be said to be above our comprehension in any sense, that attraction, and twenty other properties of bodies, may not be said to be above our comprehension. What we clearly see to be absurd, we clearly see to be so; but there is a great difference betwixt seeing a thing to be absurd, and not knowing every thing that belongs to it; or not being able to answer every question that may be asked concerning it. Some seem however to confound insolvable questions about a truth, with insolvable or invincible objections against a truth. And because there may be difficult, nay unanswerable, questions relating to a known truth; maintain there may be insolvable objections against a known truth. But \* an insolvable objection against a truth, is an argument *ad absurdum* against a truth, or a proof that a known truth cannot

\* It is worth while to read a discourse of Mr Leibnitz, de Fide & Ratione, in which this question is handled.



possibly be true. Those who delight in sophistry and grubbing, may perplex the ignorant or incautious : and no science, unhappily! has escaped this puzzling, perplexing art. But by a fatal calamity, none has suffered more than Divinity. But when the artful terms of the schools, introduced on purpose to darken and embroil the clearest truths, and to be an everlasting source of controversy and wrangling; when these artful, captious, equivocal terms of the schools are thrown aside, and truths are expressed in common, simple, plain language, the sophistry is easily seen through, and its mists are soon dispelled. \*

This way of considering the works of JESUS CHRIST, as samples of his doctrines, makes the connexion betwixt his works and his doctrines obvious to every capacity. Because we all reason in this way every day, about a thousand different things: thus the meanest labourer of the ground, or poorest mechanick, must argue frequently: we judge of friends and enemies by samples; by samples and experiments, in short, almost all our affairs in life are regulated. And I can't be blamed for having talked so much of miracles hitherto, without giving a definition of them. Because taking the miracles of JESUS CHRIST in this view, nothing more is necessary than to consider them as certain works that shewed such and such power.

It does not belong in the least, to the question, whether these works are above, or contra-

\* *Pray look into an incomparable Dissertation by Werinfelius, Professor of Theology at Basil, de Logomachiis Eruditorum.*

ry to, the established laws of nature; whether superior to human power, as they plainly are; or whether above the power of all created agents. But only what they were; and what power they were samples or experiments of. And of this any body may judge; the relation and connexion is so conspicuous and glaring.

The only thing I fear, my friend, is, that you think I have been too tedious; and have taken too much pains to make a connexion evident, that is obvious at first sight. For what can be more clear than what I have been so long insisting upon? “ That he who shews by experiments and samples, that he has a certain degree of power; really shews that he has that power. And that he who shews, by a long train of honesty and goodness, that he is good, and honest, and worthy of trust; really shews that he is good, and honest, and worthy of trust.

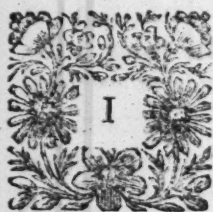


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## P A R T III.

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### S E C T. I.



Would not however be understood, my friend, as if there was no other way of reasoning from the works of J E S U S C H R I S T, to prove the truth of the religion he taught. On the contrary, there is another argument which to me seems beyond all exception. It runs thus:

“ A great number of works that shew a  
 “ power superior to human power, and to the  
 “ established laws of nature which limit hu-  
 “ man power; when produced by a preacher  
 “ of good doctrines, as signs of the divine ap-  
 “ probation; upon a solemn appeal to God  
 “ for these signs of his approbation: are the  
 “ most natural signs of the divine approbation  
 “ we can conceive.

“ And it is inconsistent with the idea of the  
 “ divine wisdom, and with the order that must  
 “ obtain in the moral, as well as the natural  
 “ world; in consequence of a divine provi-  
 “ dence; to suppose that such works could be  
 “ produced by an impostor. For in that case  
 “ the most likely and natural tokens, we can  
 “ form any notion of, would accompany a pre-

“ sumptive,



“ sumptive, deceiving pretender ; and thus a  
 “ cheat would be attended with the natural and  
 “ probable marks of truth.”

This argument, I think, must hold good ; because it is not so difficult a matter to determine what works shew a power superior to human power, and the laws of nature. Experience teaches clearly what the established uniform laws of nature are ; which we cannot controul, alter, or suspend. “ To raise the dead ; and cure  
 “ diseases by a word of our mouth are, for  
 “ example, evidently works of that *kind*.”

And tho’ we know not the spheres of activity of other beings ; the laws which limit their faculties : nor, in one word, what degrees of power created beings, superior to mankind may possess ; and consequently know not what works God alone can produce : yet knowing what works are superior to human power ; and that these works are wrought by a preacher of good doctrines, as signs of the divine approbation, upon a solemn appeal to the divine approbation ; we must conclude, that such a preacher really has the divine mission he pretends to. Or we must say, that such works produced in such a manner, are not works of the divine approbation. And at the same time it is certainly impossible to conceive more likely signs of the divine approbation ; or how indeed the divine approbation can possibly shew itself, but by such signs upon an appeal to God by the preacher for his approbation.

It is justly added to this reasoning, by way of a corroborative adjunct that a being of a malignant disposition, would never exert it’s power to  
 preach

preach and excite to virtue and piety; nor one of a good one to deceive. And thus our SAVIOUR himself argues concerning his doctrine and mission. \*

But this argument has been so fully and elegantly displayed in all it's force, by several authors, (Dr *Samuel Clarke* † particularly, and the Bishop of *Salisbury* ||) that there is no occasion for dwelling longer upon it. Only because I fancy the considering the works of JESUS CHRIST as samples adds no inconsiderable force to it; it may not be improper, to take a short view of it in all it's strength, when this additional consideration is taken into the reckoning. That thus we may have assurances how far the considering the works of CHRIST as samples go.

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## S E C T. II.

IT consists then of two propositions to be examined separately.

“ The moral world would be irregular and  
 “ disorderly; if things were not so ordered,  
 “ that the most natural and likely signs or  
 “ marks of the divine mission and approba-  
 “ tion, should never accompany an impostor.

“ But signs of power superior to human  
 “ power, which are proper and adequate sam-

\* Mark iii. 25, &c. † *Demonstration of the Being, &c.*  
 Vol. II. || See Hoadley's *Tracts*. See Grotius de Ve-  
 ritate, &c.

“ ples,

“ples, of the power claimed as a divine messenger, when produced in great numbers and unfailingly, by a preacher of doctrines in themselves good and probable ; as signs of the divine mission and approbation, are the most natural and likely signs we can conceive of the divine mission and approbation.”

If these two propositions are true it must follow, because such were the works of CHRIST, that he is not an impostor, but really sent of God.

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### S E C T. III.

THE idea of order, wisdom, and providence' necessarily infers the truth of the first. “That the proper marks of the divine approbation cannot accompany an impostor.” For what could produce greater confusion or disorder in the moral world, than the contrary permission. And on the other hand, the restraint upon the powers and faculties of beings superior to man, which such oeconomy in the government of intelligent agents, supposes cannot possibly have any bad effect. And, in one word, we must either conclude, that there is such a restraint, and such a law in the government of the moral world : or we must suppose it impossible for God, in consequence of his own administration, to instruct mankind by a mission. 'Tis to no purpose to say, that we can't reason about what may, or may not, be permitted, because sins and errors of the grossest kinds are permitted. For there is a manifest difference betwixt permitting free agents to misuse



use their liberty, and commit sins, which they themselves, and all other intelligent beings, know to be sins : or permitting errors to prevail, which all rational beings may clearly see to be such ; who will but open their eyes, to consider and examine them : And permitting the criterions and marks of truth to be confounded with those of falsehood ; the most likely and natural signs and tokens of the divine mission, and approbation to accompany and attest an impostor. In the one case, free agents are not restrained by an overpowering preternatural force, from exerting their natural powers and faculties in a free choice or election. But sin and vice remain essentially and immutably distinguishable. In the other, truth and error are confounded ; imposture and presumptuous falsehood carries away with it the proper marks of the divine authority and approbation. And can we suppose God to look on inactive, and see his authority trifled with, nay trampled upon, and prostituted.

Observe the laws in the natural world, and the order and harmony that results from the steady, uniform observance of them ; and judge whether it is not likely, that equal order and regularity must prevail in the moral. But how can it be so, if it is not an established law in the moral world, that whatever the powers of any beings are, the evidences of truth should never accompany an impostor ! Balance the inconveniencies that must follow, if there was no such rule ; with the consequences of such a rule ; and it will be no difficult matter to see on which side the probability lies.

But

But that there is such a law, is a plain consequence from the divine veracity. And that God is truth, all nature cries aloud.

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#### S E C T. IV.

“**T**HAT works which shew a power superior to that of mankind; and to the established laws of nature; and are samples of the very power claimed; when produced by a good preacher, or a preacher of good and wholesome doctrines to prove his mission, upon an appeal to God for these very signs and evidences of his mission; are proper signs of a divine mission is likewise certain.”

Mankind in all ages hath had that notion: that if God did ever reveal himself; or shew his approbation of any preacher, it would be by such signs of power as above described; that is, by \* miracles: And we cannot possibly conceive more natural signs of the divine approbation; nor indeed any other way by which God can testify his authority and approbation.

If the argument can be drawn in any case from the universal consent and opinion of mankind in all times and nations, it may in this. And indeed if God speak, or reveal himself, to mankind; what other way can we suppose or imagine him to do it? By what other evidences or tokens, but by works that demonstrate power

\* This is evident from the conduct of ancient politicians, who to give the more authority to their laws and institutions, pretended to inspiration, or an extraordinary intercourse with some revered Deity, or heavenly Being.

superior to the known laws of nature, produced upon an appeal to God for his approbation, as signs of his approbation?

If the doctrines are not consistent with our natural notions of God and virtue; or if the conduct of the preacher is not suitable to the claim of a divine mission; whatever the works are; however extraordinary; we have good reason to conclude there is no mission.

And if there is no criterion, no certain mark neither in the doctrines themselves, nor the behaviour of the preacher, by which the falshood of the claim can be known: God being always superior to all created agents, can easily refute the daring impudent pretender. And therefore when the conduct of the preacher, and the doctrines themselves are in every respect consistent with our justest notions of God and virtue; signs of power superior to the laws of nature, must be held as signs of the divine approbation, to prove which they are produced without any controul. These signs demonstrate the approbation of some being superior to man, and the laws of nature. They are marks or samples of such power. And when the divine mission in such a case is asserted, there is not the least reason to suspect that there is no mission. Nay, when these very signs of supernatural power, which God is called upon by the preacher to produce; or allow to be produced, to vouch his approbation; are actually produced: God, by these signs, declares, speaks aloud, as it were, his consent. At least it must be said, that he refuses not his approbation; because he does not controul, check, or contradict, the pretender: but on the contrary, allows him to give all the evidences



evidences that can possibly be imagined, of the truth of his pretension. And in this case, we may safely argue, That approbation not refused, is given. For it is only the refusal, by thwarting, or opposing the pretender, that can evidence it's not being granted. Signs of the divine approbation being given, which are assignable to God, must be assigned to God.

Besides, if a Being preaches good doctrines, and gives all evidences of piety and sincerity, what ground can there be to suspect such a Being of claiming a mission he is not really invested with?

Is it probable that any Being of an order superior to mankind, would run the risk of being baffled in his pretension to a divine mission? And yet every such Being must necessarily be supposed to know, as well as us, that God hath power supreme, infinitely above all created power; and can easily oppose himself to such a claim; which if it is not just, such a Being must likewise very well know, is most presumptive and impious. Is it not more likely, that any Being who can possibly be supposed to teach good doctrines, and produce extraordinary works to confirm them, if he really had no mission would pretend to none. But meerly seek his own honour and glory by the works he performed, and the doctrines he taught?

If I am not much mistaken, our SAVIOUR himself reasons somewhere, in proof of his mission, in this manner. “ I came not (*saieth he*)  
“ to seek mine own honour, but the glory of  
“ him who sent me.”

So far am I from thinking, that the divine mission and approbation is not proved, if claimed, when all the circumstances before described concur; that is, when the doctrines are good, the preacher gives evidence of sincerity and good intention; and the signs shew power superior to human power and the laws of nature; that on the contrary I should think, the only small ground of suspicion, in case of such teaching, would be, if a divine mission was not claimed; and the teacher ascribed all to his own good intention and generosity towards mankind, without pretending to any mission. And yet even in that case, there would be sufficient reason to refuse such instruction, because samples of power must necessarily prove that power of which they are samples, and marks of sincerity, must needs be marks of sincerity. And therefore what seems to me of chief account, with regard to the signs of power when a divine mission is claimed, is, that the signs of power have a plain connexion with the doctrines taught, and be samples of the power and knowledge claimed as a missionary from God.

For if there were not, there would be very good ground to call in question the claim: it being easy to God to enable his messenger to give proper samples of the power he claims as his messenger.

Thus for example, if a preacher of the resurrection should give ever so many proofs of power, but did not raise the dead; would there not be just reason to ask, But why no samples of this power to raise the dead? would it not be natural and reasonable to expect, that he would chiefly give samples and experiments of the very particular

particular power he claimed? For that is the power chiefly in question.

If therefore the preacher, not only in the general, to prove his divine mission, gives samples of great power given unto him of GOD; but also particular samples with regard to all the doctrines he teacheth; and every particular power he claims as a divine teacher; and all this upon an appeal to GOD that he was indeed sent of him; and had power from him to work with signs to shew the divine mission and approbation: the mission is certainly proved beyond all controversy. Or a mission may be pretended to, and the most natural and likely; nay the only signs of it, we can form any notion of, may accompany an impostor, without any opposition or controul. That is a divine mission cannot be proved at all; or, in other words, it is impossible for GOD to instruct mankind by a mission. And that is indeed to suppose GOD strangely limited in consequence of his own government of the world; in consequence too of a government, which we can hardly reconcile with our ideas of wisdom, order, and regularity; or with what we know of the divine administration, either in the natural or the moral world.

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#### S E C T. V.

**I**T is said that “ The great pretension of J E-  
 “ SUS CHRIST was; That he was the Mes-  
 “ sias prophesied of to the Jews: And that mi-  
 “ racles cannot prove prophecies to be fulfilled  
 “ which were not fulfilled: and that it is only  
 “ from the fulfillment of these predictions in  
 “ J E S U S



“ J E S U S C H R I S T, that his pretension can  
“ be proved.”

This is the topic of late much insisted upon. But to say the truth, this objection never mov'd me much; nor appeared to me of very great weight.

Because it is obvious, That prophecies cannot be plain and determinate, without producing great confusion and mischief in the world: But must ever run in a poetical, mystic, figurative, obscure stile; liable to various and uncertain interpretation before the event, and even after the event: unless some other circumstances concur to evince the fulfillment.

And this is the case with regard to the alledged predictions of the Jewish Messias. They are, as prophecies must necessarily be, in an obscure, figurative, mystic stile. But when we compare the character of J E S U S C H R I S T\*, and the circumstances that attended his appearance in the world, with these obscure prophecies, we see these prophecies can be applied to him: and something else renders the fulfillment of them in him indisputable; the mighty works † he wrought; together with his moral character. For he applies them to himself, claims the character of the Messias prophesied of; and at the same time shewed by his works, and the whole of his conduct, that we had sufficient reason to trust him.

*\* I would have it observed in this argument: that there is no warrant to apply any of the antient prophecies to Christ, which are not applied to him, by himself or his Apostles.*

*† Observe only the answer our Saviour gives to St John's message from prison, Matth. xi. 2, &c.*

If the prophecies could not be applied to him in any tolerable consistent sense ; that would indeed be a considerable difficulty, with regard to his pretension. But if they can be applied to him, as clearly as the nature of prophecy admits, and can be applied to nothing else, all circumstances taken in, so consistently, and fully : his applying them to himself is enough, considering what he did to confirm this application\*. In fine, the only question about this pretension to the predicted Messiahship is, whether from the doctrine, the life, the works of our SAVIOUR, there is not reason to trust his application of certain obscure prophecies to himself ? when all the alledged prophecies of the Messias are laid together ; they amount to no more than predictions of an extraordinary teacher, and deliverer, and worker of miracles, to appear to the Jews, teaching repentance, the forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection from the dead †. And was not our SAVIOUR such a teacher, such a deliverer ; and did he not appear in, and about the time prophesied of, if the meaning of these antient prophecies can at all be guessed at, or ascertained with any tolerable degree of probability ?

But whatever be said of these antient prophecies ; I must believe, that he who raised the dead, had power to raise the dead ; that he who could make happy and miserable ; cure all diseases ; and banish all infirmities ; had power to make happy and miserable.

\* *I would likewise have it observed upon this head ; that several ways of speaking among the ancient prophets, are only applied in the new testament to Christ in an allusive sense.*

† *This is plain from our Saviour's answer to John's message from prison.*

Say

Say therefore that there never were such prophecies of a Messias ; say the arguments fetched from them, were only arguments *ad hominem*; taking advantage of a prevailing notion and expectation : say, in short, whatever you please upon this head of prophecies ; it will still remain certain and indisputable, “ That the doctrines “ JESUS CHRIST taught were excellent doctrines; that he gave by the whole of his “ conduct, all the possible evidences of sincerity and honesty; and that his works were “ exact and perfect samples of the power he “ claimed: the power of raising the dead; for “ giving sins; and making the good and virtuous happy, and the vicious and unworthy “ miserable in the life that is to come.

It would be impertinent to insist longer upon this article, when I have nothing new, or that has not been fifty times repeated of late, to offer \*.

## S E C T. VI.

**H**AVING thus, my friend, answered my principal design ; allow me just to add a few remarks upon the Christian doctrine, and the reasons why Christianity hath been so much disputed, and controverted.

And the first and chief reason is certainly because natural religion is not sufficiently understood ; nor it's principles fully comprehended.

\* *Allow me to recommend to you, upon this question, Limborchii amica collatio cum Judæo.*



If those who represent the Christian doctrine in certain lights; understood the principles of natural religion; they could not possibly entertain such notions of Revealed Religion. And if Christianity was not sadly misrepresented by its pretended teachers; those who understood and believed natural religion, could not possibly find fault with Christianity; or at least oppose themselves to it, so obstinately and vehemently.

Was I even in doubt about the being of a God; and an over-ruling providence, I behoved to reason thus with my self. Tho' there were no God; no providence; virtue would still be the interest of mankind in general, and of every individual in particular: and if there is a God (and that there is all nature cries aloud throughout all her works) the way, the only way, and the infallible way to please him, and recommend our selves to his favour, is by the love and practice of virtue. Virtue therefore is in any case my duty, my interest; if it is my duty and my interest to make myself as happy as I can; or if it is my duty and my interest to promote the interest of society and my kind to the utmost of my power; for these two are inseparably joined and connected together. Virtue and social affection work at once towards the publick good of mankind, and the private happiness of every particular person. Vice and unsocial affection, on the contrary, work unavoidably towards private as well as publick misery.

Whether therefore there is, or is not a God, my duty and my interest remains the same.

But was I even in doubt about the Being of a God and a providence, the authority of one  
H who

who shewed by his works an extraordinary superiority in nature, an extraordinary power and knowledge, would be sufficient to remove my doubts, and assure me that there is a God and a providence ; for I could have no reason to suspect such a Teacher, if he shewed in all his conduct the greatest benevolence and compassion towards mankind, and taught no other doctrine concerning future felicity or misery but this ; “ That there is a God and a future state, “ and that the only way to recommend to the “ divine favour and approbation, either here “ or hereafter, was by the practice of virtue, “ by leading a social rational life.”

That there are Beings superior to man, who may know this truth and inform mankind of it, there is no ground to doubt : and if such a testimony or information was offered, all that could be required to render it credible, is an evidence of such knowledge of nature, and the government of the world, as shews the Teacher is of an order superior to man ; and in such a situation that he may certainly know that truth.

And therefore in this sense it may be said, that even the principles of natural religion, the Being of a God and a providence, may be proved by revelation, or taught by a divine mission.

But no divine mission can possibly teach another religion than that which nature and reason sufficiently establisheth, if we would but hearken to it's dictates. “ That the way, the \* sure

\* Mat. 12. 30, &c. Luke 6. John 15. 12. James 2. 28. Mat. v. vi. vii. Tit. 2. 11, &c. 3. 6, &c. 1 John 4.

“ way, the only way to please God, or gain  
 “ his love and approbation, is by the love and  
 “ practice of virtue, by imitating his goodness  
 “ and benevolence in our sphere to the utmost  
 “ of our abilities.”



taught for christianity in it's room, who could find in his heart to oppose christianity ; who would not wish christianity was true ; who would not naturally be prejudiced in it's favour ? every virtuous man certainly would ; for it is natural to every virtuous spirit to wish for honour, glory, and immortality.

Even those who, unluckily for them, had not the inward satisfaction of believing, would wish well to christianity for the sake of society and mankind, and like to see so noble, so comfortable, so beneficial a belief prevail universally, and universally produce the good works which it is the end and tendency of the christian doctrine to propagate among mankind.

Let then christianity have fair play ; let us look for the genuine doctrines of christianity in the gospel of our SAVIOUR ; and let us distinguish betwixt them and the vain additions and commandments of men, by which indeed the doctrines and commandments of GOD are rendered of little or no effect ; and what is contrary to virtue and to piety, and consequently to christianity, let us set our selves together with all our might to destroy it. But let none who wish well to mankind and society ever think of diminishing the obligations to virtue, the great bond of society and human happiness.

Let us never think of extirpating the most agreeable, the most cheering belief of a future state ; the belief that tends so much to promote virtue and goodness, and without which there is too much ground to fear very little virtue would remain in the world. Let us consider before we declare against christianity, even tho' at a  
ime

time we should happen to doubt, whether men would be better fathers, or better husbands; better sons, or better subjects; in one word, better members of society, without the belief which true christianity is designed to propagate in the world: for wilfully to endeavour to make men worse than they are, is certainly the worst, the most malicious office.

Christianity hath not added any thing to our duty, either towards GOD or our fellow creatures \*, that natural reason doth not teach and demonstrate to be our duty; it only sets the duties of natural religion, or which our natural light teacheth in a clear light; and sheweth their full and perfect extent, in opposition to false and corrupting misrepresentations, and urgeth to them by motives and considerations the most forcible and engaging, which natural reason is not able to ascertain. For as to the two rites, or ceremonies of baptism and the supper, they are designed to be kept up among christians, to preserve the memory of JESUS CHRIST, his doctrine and works; particularly his death and resurrection; and as outward signs, by which they may publicly profess their belief of christianity and gratitude to it's divine Author.

And this puts me in mind to observe, that I never met with any objection against the morality of the christian religion, except one; "That

\* Our duty to GOD and our fellow creatures must result necessarily from our nature and relation to GOD and our fellow creatures; and consequently must be deducible from this relation by reason: nor can any duty possibly arise from this relation; which is not demonstrable by reason.

" friendship

“ friendship was not recommended †.” And this not a little surprized me ; because we have a remarkable example of friendship betwixt our SAVIOUR and his disciple *John*. And at the same time that general benevolence is strongly inculcated by christianity, without which there can be no true virtuous friendship, and which naturally must produce friendship, when proper occasion offers of contracting that intimate union of souls, emphatically so called, which can’t subsist but betwixt honest hearts ; and is better understood by feeling than it can be by any definition \* ; nor need I describe it to you, who daily experience it’s sincere delights.

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## S E C T. VII.

**A**Nother remark that I would’ make, is, That there cannot possibly be any article of faith about what is obscure and disputable as to it’s meaning in the christian revelation, but this one ; “ That it is obscure and disputable ; and GOD can never require of us to “ understand that which is not made plain.” To throw away or despise what is clear, and evidently useful in any work, because there are other things we can’t make any certain sense of,

† See *Characteristicks*, Vol. 3.

\* To see how naturally true virtuous friendship springs from the universal benevolence christianity teaches, one needs only read what my Lord Shaftsbury says upon that subject in his incomparable treatise upon virtue and merit ; where one will see the difference betwixt generous true friendship, and partial friendship charmingly described.



is certainly most unreasonable. And for those who are agreed together in the belief of what is plainly told, to fall out, and treat one another rudely, because of different opinions about what is obscure, is no less so. And yet would but christians remember this, the controversies that divide them so much, would soon be at an end ; or at least all disputes among christians would be carried on and managed in a most amicable, agreeable manner : whatever obscurity there may be elsewhere, there is none at all in the precepts, which are of indisputable obligation. Charity, benevolence, moderation and humanity, are clearly enjoined : and to the practice of these virtues it is that eternal life and happiness, is as clearly promised. Is it not therefore very odd and surprizing that christians who consent in this ; that the practice of these duties is the chief thing ; and that the doctrine of a future state and a resurrection from the dead, is the main doctrine of christianity, the doctrine of chief importance, should not reason with one another about the meaning of certain places in the sacred writings, which they both own to be of difficult interpretation, with all calmness, good nature and modesty ?

In the mean time nothing can be more certain than that what is not plainly and distinctly revealed to us, and of easy certain interpretation, can only be designed for an exercise of charity and friendly conference or dispute.

To believe that what is obscure is of vast importance, and that our salvation depends upon the hitting the meaning rightly, is a notion contrary to all our natural ideas of God and his  
divine

divine perfections ; it is supposing a divine revelation a snare, or sphinx. If it is said, that after all there cannot be much virtue or merit in the faith of the commons, because they cannot possibly philosophize about miracles, and their connexion with doctrines : I answer that I am far from thinking that it is belief, however rational and well founded, that can recommend to God ; it is only a good life and conversation. And if the faith of the commons produce this effect, they will be accepted of God, because of their virtue, piety and goodness, without regard to the grounds upon which their belief is founded. But the great advantage of christianity is, that it is able to give rational satisfaction to the philosopher, about points of the greatest importance, to his contentment ; and at the same time to excite the inferior herd of mankind to the practice of virtue, in the way that they are most capable of being moved and influenced.

But after all, however difficult it may be to make the commons understand the bulls of popes, the creeds of councils, a metaphysical catechism ; it is not so hard a task to make the meanest mechanic comprehend the genuine doctrines of christianity, and their connexion with the works of CHRIST. Nor is the historical evidence, when represented in a simple familiar light, as it may easily be, above the vulgar reach. Every body reasons about things of the same kind every day.

If you ask me, my friend, how an unbeliever, living among christians, ought to be treated by christians ? I answer ; with all tenderness, compassion

passion and good will, for so humanity requires, so christianity teaches ; and that is the only way to bring in those that are without.

If you ask me, what may be his fate hereafter ? I answer, “ Every man will be judged “ by his works.” And one who is conscious to himself of no prejudice against christianity, that he has examined it fairly, and yet can’t help doubting, if at the same time he leads a virtuous and regular life, has nothing to fear ; so christianity as well as reason teaches me. Virtue is the main thing, the end of believing ; and the best and worthiest part that one can act in matters of opinion and belief, is to examine impartially. This is an eternal immutable truth : “ That he who feareth God, loveth mercy, “ and worketh righteousness, will be accepted “ of God ; who hath no respect of persons, “ but will judge every one according to his “ works \*.” But I hope no unbeliever, who loves mankind and society, will take it amiss if I again put him in mind ; that whatever his opinion may be of the evidences and grounds of the Christian Religion, it is doing a real mischief to mankind and society, to endeavour to destroy or diminish the faith and persuasion of a future state of rewards and punishments.

In my next I will give you my sentiments concerning the historical evidence of the works of JESUS CHRIST ; and at the same time my opinion of the antient magic, so much talked of. In the mean time it is obvious, “ That “ those who were eye-witnesses to the works of

\* *And this is what GOD hath also taught us by JESUS CHRIST, Acts x. 34. &c.*



“ our SAVIOUR, had the same evidence for  
 “ the truth of his pretension, That those have  
 “ of the skill of a painter, who see him draw  
 “ a fine picture; or of the truth of a conclusion  
 “ who see the experiments performed, from  
 “ which it naturally and necessarily follows.”

*I am &c*

F I N I S.

